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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000411

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: IRAN: NEW MILITARY APPOINTMENTS INDICATE ONGOING IRGC  
STRUCTURAL RE-ALIGNMENT?

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence  
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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: According to Iranian press the IRIG is set to merge the Basij Resistance Force into the IRGC Ground Forces. In a move assumed by Iranian press to be related, on October 4 Supreme Leader Khamenei announced four high-level personnel changes within the IRGC, including appointing Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi Basij Forces Commander. His predecessor, hardline conservative Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ta'eb, is reportedly being transferred to the IRGC Intelligence branch, although that transfer has not been confirmed. If in fact the Basij is integrated within the IRGC Ground Forces, it would be the second phase of an IRGC re-organization conceived by its Commander, Major General Mohammad Ali Jaafari. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) On October 4 Supreme Leader Khamenei announced the following four high level military appointments:

-Basij Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi, as commander of the Basij Forces;

-IRGC Brigadier Mohammad Hoseynzadeh Hejazi, as Deputy Commander for Logistics, Support and Industrial Research, Armed Forces General Staff;

-IRGC Brigadier General Hossein Salami, as IRGC Deputy Commander; and,

-IRGC Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh, as Commander, IRGC Aerospace Force.

¶3. (C) According to unconfirmed Iranian press reports, former Basij Commander Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ta'eb will be made deputy of the IRGC Intelligence Branch. Also according to unconfirmed reports, Director of the Armed Forces General Staff Major General Hassan Firouzabadi is to be replaced, although his office has denied the report.

¶4. (C) New Basij commander Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi first became prominent in approximately 1997 at the start of the Khatami administration, when he was the head of the Intelligence Security ("hefazat-e ettela'at") Section of the Law Enforcement Forces (LEF). At that time reformist forces aligned with then-President Khatami accused him of torturing imprisoned Tehran Deputy Mayors during the investigation and subsequent prosecution of then-Tehran Mayor Karbaschi. Naqdi was subsequently tried and found guilty in a military court for these offenses and given a three-month sentence. However this sentence was never implemented, and a few months after his removal from the LEF he was appointed as a military advisor to Supreme Leader Khamenei.

¶5. (C) Naqdi was also among the IRGC generals to have signed a letter pointedly directing President Khatami to resolve the 1999 student protests lest the IRGC remove him from power. When Ahmadinejad became President in 2005, he appointed Naqdi as the Head of the Anti-Smuggling Central Headquarters, a post from which he resigned in June 2007. (COMMENT: United Nations Security Council Resolution 1803 included Naqdi in its travel ban for his efforts to evade earlier Security Council resolutions in his capacity as Deputy Chief of Armed Forces General Staff for Logistics and Industrial Research. END COMMENT).

¶6. (C) According to press Naqdi's predecessor Hojjatoleslam Hossein Ta'eb, rumored to have been considered for MOIS chief at the start of Ahmadinejad's second term, will be appointed a position in IRGC Intelligence. Ta'eb has repeatedly accused the United States of plotting to overthrow the IRIG; in late September he alleged the USG was hiring "agents and mercenaries"

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for that purpose. (COMMENT: Ta'eb's mindset appears to dovetail with that of IRGC Commander Jaafari, who has re-oriented the IRGC to focus on the threat of a 'velvet revolution.' END COMMENT.)

#### BASIJ SUBSUMED INTO IRGC GROUND FORCES

¶7. (C) Along with these personnel changes is the reported imminent merging of the Basij into the IRGC Ground Forces, a long rumored development reportedly intended to improve coordination. Since the early days of the Revolution the Basij had maintained its relative independence from the IRGC despite technically falling under its authority. However, in October 2007 as part of his broader changes to the IRGC to focus on internal threats, Jaafari placed the Basij under the authority of the IRGC's Joint Chief of Staff. At the time, he promised that the Basij would maintain its independence and not become a part of the IRGC ground forces. The Supreme Leader's representative to the IRGC made similar assurances in mid-2008. If these reports are accurate, Jaafari has rolled back such promises in what Iranian media construes as the "second stage" of his plan to re-orient that IRGC, the first stage being the establishment of provincial IRGC Command Centers in each of Iran's provinces.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: According an IRPO analytical contact with extensive IRGC expertise, the Basij has long sought to resist IRGC efforts to incorporate it into its ground forces. But Basij integration within the IRGC Ground Forces would continue the

process of its organizational assimilation into the IRGC. It is yet unclear how exactly these just-announced personnel changes are connected to any impending bureaucratic re-arrangement; similarly, it is unclear whether Ta'eb's potential transfer to IRGC Intelligence represents a promotion or a demotion. What is clear is that IRGC Commander Jaafari, with the blessing of Supreme Leader Khamenei, is continuing his re-organization of the IRGC in line with his theories on the primacy of countering the "soft threats" now facing the regime. END COMMENT.  
EYRE